

1 UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

2
3
4 BEFORE THE BOARD OF PATENT APPEALS
5 AND INTERFERENCES
6

7
8 *Ex parte* FRANK C. SMITH, JR.
9

10
11 Appeal 2007-2901
12 Application 10/701,146
13 Technology Center 3600
14

15
16 Decided: December 12, 2007
17

18
19 *Before* WILLIAM F. PATE III, MURRIEL E. CRAWFORD, and
20 JENNIFER D. BAHR, *Administrative Patent Judges*.

21
22 PATE, III, *Administrative Patent Judge*.

23
24 DECISION ON APPEAL

25
26 STATEMENT OF CASE

27
28 The Appellant appeals under 35 U.S.C. § 134 (2002) from a final
29 rejection of claims 1 to 11. We have jurisdiction under 35 U.S.C. § 6(b)
30 (2002).

1 The Appellant claims a canard design aircraft that includes an opening
2at the rear of the fuselage with a door for allowing loading of objects into the
3aircraft.

4 Independent claims 1 and 11 read as follows:

5 1. A cargo adapted aircraft, comprising:
6 a canard having two and only two significant horizontal
7 lifting surfaces, with a smaller lifting surface in front of a larger
8 lifting surface; and
9 a large opening at the rear of the fuselage through which
10 objects can be loaded, the opening having a door type of
11 closure for flight.

12
13 11. A cargo-adapted personal aircraft, comprising:
14 a canard having two significant horizontal lifting surfaces
15 with a smaller lifting surface in front of a larger lifting surface;
16 a large opening at the rear of the fuselage through which
17 objects can be loaded; and
18 having no empennage.
19

20 The prior art relied upon by the Examiner in rejecting the claims is:

21	Sutton	2,492,245	Dec. 27, 1949
22	Weaver	2,759,691	Aug. 21, 1956
23	Rutan	4,641,800	Feb. 10, 1987
24	Firestone	3,572,615	Mar. 30, 1971

25
26 Claims 1-11 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph,
27as being indefinite.

28 Claims 1-6 and 8-11 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as
29unpatentable over Sutton in view of Weaver and Rutan.

1 Claim 7 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as unpatentable over
2Sutton in view of Weaver, Rutan, and Firestone.

3 We AFFIRM-IN-PART and REMAND for further proceedings
4consistent with this DECISION.

5

6 ISSUES

7 1. Whether the Appellant has shown that the Examiner erred in
8rejecting claims 1-11 as being indefinite.

9 2. Whether the Appellant has shown that the Examiner erred in
10rejecting claims 1-6 and 8-11 as unpatentable over Sutton in view of Weaver
11and Rutan.

12 3. Whether the Appellant has shown the Examiner erred in rejecting
13dependent claim 7 as unpatentable over Sutton in view of Weaver, Rutan,
14and Firestone.

15

16 FINDINGS OF FACT

17 The record supports the following findings of fact (FF) by a
18preponderance of the evidence.

19 1. Sutton discloses a tail-less, “flying wing” design aircraft (Fig. 1;
20Col. 1, 52-Col. 2, l. 4).

21 2. Weaver discloses an aircraft 10 with cargo loading door 17 at the
22rear end of the fuselage 12 (Figs. 1-3; Col. 2, ll. 40-49).

1 3. Rutan '800 discloses a canard design aircraft 10 having only two
2horizontal lifting surfaces with a smaller lifting surface 16 in front of a larger
3lifting surface 14 (Figs. 1-3; Col. 4, ll. 26-34).

4 4. Rutan '800 also discloses a canard design aircraft without booms
5or an empennage (Figs. 1-3).

6 5. The Appellant states that “[p]rior ‘canard’ designs for cargo-
7oriented craft that incorporated a rear fuselage door, the only known design
8being the Rutan ATTT, have utilized three horizontal lifting surfaces,
9including a boom-supported tail empennage” (Spec. 3, ll. 9-11). Thus, a
10canard design, cargo-oriented aircraft with a rear fuselage door is known.

11 6. The Appellant further states “[e]xperience flying model canards,
12constructing an experimental canard, accompanying Mr. Rutan flying an
13experimental canard, being connected to the Voyager project and witnessing
14a single tractor engine successfully tested with a canard, all convinced the
15instant inventor that the canard design was a cost effective feasible solution”
16(App. Br. 5, ll. 9-12). Thus, a canard design aircraft with a single tractor
17engine has been successfully tested.

18

19

PRINCIPLES OF LAW

20 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, recites that “[t]he specification
21shall conclude with one or more claims particularly pointing out and
22distinctly claiming the subject matter which the applicant regards as his
23invention.” Claims are in compliance with 35 U.S.C. § 112, second
24paragraph, if “the claims, read in light of the specification, reasonably

1apprise those skilled in the art and are as precise as the subject matter
2permits.” *Hybritech, Inc. v. Monoclonal Antibodies, Inc.*, 802 F.2d 1367,
31385 (Fed. Cir. 1986). When a claim uses a word of degree, like
4“substantially,” the Specification must be examined to determine whether
5some standard for measuring that degree is provided and whether one of
6ordinary skill in the art would understand what is claimed when the claim is
7read in light of the Specification. *Seattle Box Co. v. Industrial Crating &*
8*Packing, Inc.*, 731 F.2d 818, 826 (Fed. Cir. 1984).

9 In addition, 35 U.S.C. § 103 “forbids issuance of a patent when ‘the
10differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art
11are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the
12time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to
13which said subject matter pertains.’” *KSR Int’l Co. v. Teleflex Inc.*, 127 S.Ct.
141727, 1734 (2007). The Supreme Court reaffirmed the principle that “[t]he
15combination of familiar elements according to known methods is likely to be
16obvious when it does no more than yield predictable results.” *KSR*, 127
17S.Ct. at 1739. The Court further explained that “[o]ften, it will be necessary
18for a court to look to interrelated teachings of multiple patents; the effects of
19demands known to the design community or present in the marketplace; and
20the background knowledge possessed by a person having ordinary skill in
21the art, all in order to determine whether there was an apparent reason to
22combine the known elements in the fashion claimed by the patent at issue.”
23*Id.* at 1740-41. The Court noted that “[t]o facilitate review, this analysis
24should be made explicit.” *Id.*, citing *In re Kahn*, 441 F.3d 977, 988 (Fed.

1Cir. 2006) (“[R]ejections on obviousness grounds cannot be sustained by
2mere conclusory statements; instead, there must be some articulated
3reasoning with some rational underpinning to support the legal conclusion of
4obviousness”). However, “the analysis need not seek out precise teachings
5directed to the specific subject matter of the challenged claim, for a court
6can take account of the inferences and creative steps that a person of
7ordinary skill in the art would employ.” *Id.* at 41.

8

9

10

11

ANALYSIS

12

Rejection of claims 1-11 under 35 U.S.C. § 112

13

The Examiner states that the term “significant” in the limitation “two
14significant horizontal lifting surfaces” of independent claims 1 and 11 is
15indefinite because the term is vague, raising the question as to what
16qualifies as a significant horizontal lifting surface (Ans. 3, l. 19-Ans. 4, l. 2).

17

The Appellant contends that in view of the Specification, one of
18ordinary skill would understand what is being claimed (App. Br. 3, ll. 31-
1934). In support, the Appellant refers to portions of the Specification stating
20parenthetically that “significant” means non trivial and non *de minimus*
21(Spec. 4, l. 29-32). We agree with the Appellants that the term “significant”
22does not render claims 1-11 indefinite in the present case.

23

Even though the term “significant” is a term of degree as the
24Examiner notes, the claim limitation “significant horizontal lifting surfaces,”

25

1reasonably apprises those skilled in the art as to the claim scope when read
2in light of the Specification, and the term is as precise as the subject matter
3permits. *Hybritech*, 802 F.2d at 1385; *Seattle Box*, 731 F.2d at 826. While
4the terms “non trivial” and “non *de minimus*” set forth in the Specification to
5clarify the meaning of “significant” are also relative terms, these terms assist
6one of ordinary skill in the art of aviation in understanding that the
7horizontal lift surfaces must be more than trivial and *de minimus*. The term
8is also as precise as the subject matter permits because it would be difficult
9for the Appellant to specifically quantify what constitutes a “significant
10horizontal lifting surface.” A lifting surface having a specific dimension may
11be important in the proper functioning of a small, light-weight aircraft, or be
12entirely trivial and *de minimus* in a large, heavy aircraft. We believe this
13fact will be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art. Therefore, in
14view of the above, the Appellant has shown that the Examiner erred in
15rejecting claims 1-11 based on the term “significant.”

16 The Examiner also rejected claims 1-10 as being indefinite because of
17the term “type” in the limitation “door type of closure.” The Examiner cited
18MPEP § 2173.05(b) E which states that addition of the word “type” can
19render indefinite an otherwise definite expression (Ans. 3, Il. 16-18). We
20agree.

21 The only instance in the Specification where similar language is found
22states “any number of door types and closure arrangements could be
23utilized” (Spec. 5, Il. 30-31). The Specification also states that “[m]any
24other means for closure of openings are known and would be operable.”

1(Spec. 5, ll. 4-7). The Appellant has argued in the Appeal Brief that there
2could be a spectrum of other types of closures for the opening including a
3permanently sealed or welded shut type of closure, although such closures
4do not appear to be described in the Specification (App. Br. 4, ll. 15-17).
5The Specification appears to merely describe various embodiments of
6“doors,” without any specific discussion as to what would constitute a “door
7type of closure” that suggests something more inclusive than just doors.
8Thus, the inclusion of the word “type” to the otherwise definite expression
9“door” renders claims 1-10 indefinite because it extends the claim scope and
10makes it unclear as to what the term “type” was intended to convey. *Ex*
11*parte Copenhagen*, 109 USPQ 118 (Bd. App. 1955). Hence, the Appellant
12has not shown that the Examiner erred in rejecting claims 1-10 as being
13indefinite, but has shown that the Examiner erred in rejecting claim 11 as
14being indefinite.
15

16 Rejection of claims 1-6, and 8-11 under 35 U.S.C. § 103

17 In rejecting these claims, the Examiner asserts that it would have been
18obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art to modify the “flying wing”
19aircraft of Sutton by adding a door at the rear of the fuselage as disclosed in
20Weaver to “allow easy loading and unloading of cargos” (FFs 1 and 2; Ans.
214, ll. 5-17). The Examiner further asserts that it would have been obvious to
22one of ordinary skill in the art to add canard wings of Rutan ‘800 to
23“improve maneuverability” of the flying wing aircraft of Sutton (FF 3; Ans.
244, ll. 5-17).

1 The Appellant argues that the Examiner erred in that there is no
2motivation to modify the flying wing of Sutton to provide the door of
3Weaver, or to provide canard wing disclosed in Rutan '800 (App. Br. 6, l. 5-
4App. Br. 7, l. 23; Reply 1, 13-Reply 3, l. 20). The Appellant further
5contends that Sutton teaches away from adding a canard to the disclosed
6flying wing aircraft (Reply 3, 21-Reply 5, l. 9).

7 We agree with the Appellant that one of ordinary skill in the art would
8not be motivated to modify the "flying wing" aircraft of Sutton to
9incorporate a canard wing of Rutan to thereby "improve maneuverability" as
10asserted by the Examiner. Sutton does not suggest or teach desirability of a
11canard wing, but rather proposes improvements to the flying wing design to
12enhance control of diving moments and longitudinal stability (Col. 1, l. 52-
13Col. 2, l. 4). As noted by the Appellant, Sutton appears to teach away from
14the modification suggested by the Examiner by noting the use of an auxiliary
15lifting surface forward of the center of gravity in the art (i.e. canard wing),
16but not incorporating such an auxiliary lifting surface into the flying wing
17aircraft disclosed (Col. 1, l. 29-36; Br. 7, ll. 1-8). Rutan '800 is directed to a
18canard design aircraft with canard wings that can be pivoted to achieve high
19lift (Col. 3, ll. 18-30).

20 While the Examiner need not seek out precise teachings directed to
21the specific subject matter of the claim, the Examiner must provide a rational
22basis for combining the references in the manner suggested. We do not
23believe that the Examiner's reasoning for providing a canard wing on a
24flying wing design aircraft is rational because in addition to Sutton teaching

1away from the modification suggested, there is no evidence of reasonable
2expectation for success that such a modified aircraft would be functional,
3especially considering that wing configuration is a fundamental aspect of an
4aircraft (Br. 7, ll. 15-20). Therefore, because the Examiner has not provided
5a rational basis for combining the references in the manner suggested, the
6Examiner erred in rejecting claim 1, as well as claims 2-6 and 8-11
7dependent thereon, as unpatentable over Sutton in view of Weaver and
8Rutan.

9 The Appellant also separately argued that the Examiner's rejection of
10claims 5, 6, and 11 under 35 U.S.C. § 103 is improper in view of the
11definitions for the recited "light personal aircraft" and "personal aircraft" set
12forth in the Specification (Spec. 5, ll. 8-11; App. Br. 7, ll. 25-30). However,
13the Appellant's arguments are moot in view of the above finding of
14Examiner error regarding independent claim 1.
15

16 Rejection of claim 7 under 35 U.S.C. § 103

17 For the reasons set forth above relative to claim 1, and because the
18Examiner's application of Firestone does not remedy the deficiency of the
19combination of Sutton, Weaver, and Rutan discussed above, the Examiner's
20rejection of claim 7 under 35 U.S.C. § 103 is cannot be sustained.
21

22

23

REMAND TO THE EXAMINER

24

1 4. The Examiner's rejection of claim 7 as unpatentable over Sutton in
2view of Weaver, Rutan and Firestone is REVERSED.

3 The present Appeal is REMANDED to the Examiner to make
4additional factual findings and conclusion of law.

5 No time period for taking any subsequent action in connection with
6this appeal may be extended under 37 C.F.R. § 1.136(a). *See* 37 C.F.R.
7§ 1.136(a)(1)(iv) (2006).

8

9 AFFIRMED-IN-PART; REMANDED

10

11

12

13vsh

14

15

16SUE Z. SHAPER, P.C.

171800 WEST LOOP SOUTH

18SUITE 1450

19HOUSTON TX 77027